Fundamental Chess Strategy in 100 Games

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Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Typesetting: Mark Haast

Proofreading: Ezra Kirk

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Philippe Tonnard

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Fundamental Chess Strategy in 100 Games

Boroljub Zlatanovic

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move	⩲	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	⩱	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+–	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	–+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
⟳	lead in development	⇆	with counterplay
⨀	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	⌓	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
=∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

Biography of Boroljub Zlatanovic

- Born in Cuprija, Serbia, 5 August 1977
- Started chess at 4 years old, watching his father play
- First club "*Radnicki*", Cuprija, at 7 years old
- *FIDE Master* since 1994 (only recognised in 1998)
- Serbian Youth Champion in 1995
- Champion of Belgrade University in 2001 and 2002
- *International Master* since 2014
- *Fide Trainer* since 2015
- Winner of many open, blitz, rapid and internet events
- Professional coach for over 15 years
- Author and contributor to *American Chess Magazine* since 2019

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Preface

*“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”*
Sun Tzu

Dear reader,

This book will bring something new to your chess library. In our computer era, focus is usually on openings. Watching recent broadcasts, the new generation would rather choose games of a certain opening and look for an interesting idea or even a brilliant novelty. I offer, and recommend, a different concept altogether, based on the famous Soviet school of chess. The focus should be on understanding strategical concepts, principles and underlying logic. Fashionable opening lines will be forgotten (or re-evaluated) sooner or later, but understanding cannot be lost, and can be only upgraded. It is sad to see some players that are well equipped with opening lines, who are unable to realise a big positional advantage in an endgame. So, our advice is to concentrate on *Strategy* and *Logic*.

This book is highly recommended for club players, advanced players and masters, although even higher rated players may also find it useful. There is no doubt that lower rated players will learn a lot about thinking processes and decision making, while some logical principles can be put to use by more advanced players too.

The reader may ask: Why *those* games? The games presented in this book cannot be classified as the “best ever” (of course, such a classification is subjective). However, each game was chosen for its logic and instructive value. Of course, the author understands that readers’ opinion may differ. Either way, the games are useful for exploring many important points: *How to evaluate a position and choose an appropriate plan? Where to attack? When to attack? When to exchange? How to realise an advantage?...* Learning how to answer such important questions during your future games will improve your chess knowledge and technique considerably. Always try and introduce logic into your games – you will be delighted with the results!

The author also chose some instructive games with the idea to illustrate some psychologically important moments in chess such as the counter-attack, zeitnot or realisation.

The games are separated into chapters, each focusing on a topic. This should facilitate the reader's navigation through the book.

Hoping that this book will be as informative as it is interesting, and wishing you all the best in your future games,

Yours faithfully,
Boroljub Zlatanovic

Thank you to everyone that supported me, and to all fellow chess lovers



The Centre

Of course, it is clear that the side that has control over the centre should have good prospects on both flanks. But, why? Well, just remember the number of squares pieces can control from the centre, compared to the corner. The difference is evident. It is also evident that pieces placed in the centre can be easily transferred to any part of the board. Furthermore, if the opponent's piece is out of play, we should take action on the opposite part of the board. Like in real war, we should strike before the opponent has a chance to regroup! And of course, when having more centralised pieces, it is natural to prevent the opponent from centralising his own pieces or from allowing him to undermine ours.

Let’s remember Nimzowitsch's famous “principle of two weaknesses”. He wrote that the side having “better communication lines” should try to create two weaknesses in the opponent’s camp. According to him, better communication lines (yes, that's better control over the centre!) would lead to conquering one of these weaknesses!

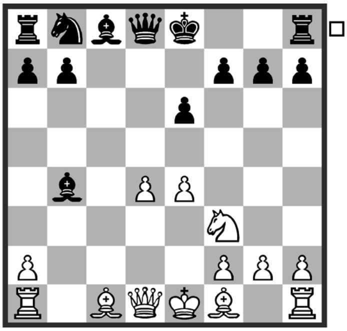
Do you think it sounds confusing? Just take a look at the brilliant masterpieces by Karpov and Rubinstein and you will see this is actually a simple principle (their games are highly instructive for understanding the principle of centralisation – I can't remember other players so straight-forwardly implementing these principles in their games). In this chapter (and, of course, in other chapters) you will see some brilliantly conducted games in which centralisation was the key principle.

I really hope you will perfectly understand the concept of centralisation and manage to implement it successfully into your games. "If the opponent neglects centralisation, just improve yours!"

Game 1

Rubinstein – Schlechter
San Sebastian 1912

1. d4 d5 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3. c4 e6 4. ♘c3 c5 5. cxd5 ♘xd5 6. e4 ♘xc3 7. bxc3 cxd4 8. cxd4 ♗b4+



Position after: 8... ♗b4+

With this move and the next, Black intends to finish development and exchange some material. That is generally a good strategy against an opponent's space advantage.

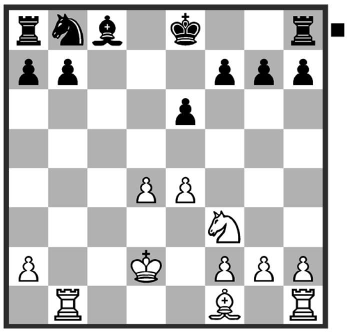
9. ♗d2 ♕a5 10. ♖b1!

10. ♗xb4 is wrong. After 10... ♕xb4+ 11. ♕d2 ♕xd2+ 12. ♔xd2 ♔e7 there are no problems for Black. After the text move, White has an extra tempo – the rook is already on b1!

10... ♗xd2+

10... ♘c6? is a mistake. After 11. ♖xb4! ♘xb4 12. ♕b3 White is winning. The following line is very pretty: 12... ♕xa2 13. ♗b5+ ♗d7 14. ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 15. ♘e5+ ♔e8 16. ♕xb4 ♕a1+ 17. ♔e2 ♕xh1 18. ♕b5+ with mate.

11. ♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 12. ♔xd2



Position after: 12. ♔xd2

White is slightly better due to his space advantage and better development. Black should follow the idea ...♔e7, ...♖d8, ...b6, ...♗a6 with centralisation and patient improving. But, instead...

12... 0-0?

A very bad move, neglecting centralisation principles. How should White continue? Black's king is now far from the centre and there must be a good move

leading to a serious advantage! Rubinstein's next move proves he was one of the greatest players ever – no other player could so easily find such fine moves. The next move is a testament to his amazing, colossal strategical knowledge.

13. ♗b5!

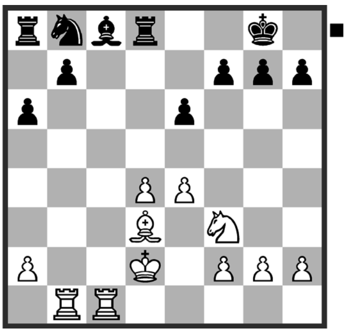
Brilliant move – one of the best ever! It looks like a waste of time, but White will actually win a tempo! The move has two points. Firstly, it prevents natural developing moves such as ...♘c6, ...♘d7 and ...♗d7. And secondly, it forces the move 13... a6, weakening the b6-square.

13. ♗d3 b6 14. ♖hc1 ♗a6 15. ♖c7 ♗xd3 16. ♔xd3 ♘a6 looks OK for Black.

13... a6 14. ♗d3 ♖d8

14... ♘c6 15. ♖b6 is very bad for Black.

15. ♖hc1

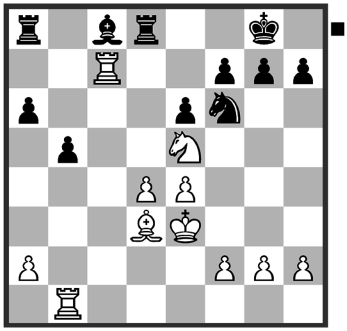


Position after: 15. ♖hc1

15... b5

A sad necessity. Black is forced to play with pawns while White's army enjoys perfectly centralised squares. Fixed pawns on a6 and b5 will be good targets. There are also weak dark-squares on the queenside.

16. ♖c7 ♘d7 17. ♔e3! ♘f6 18. ♘e5!



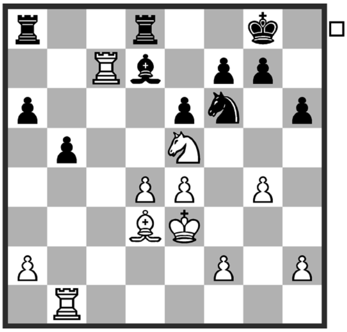
Position after: 18. ♘e5!

Absolute harmony! Please, take a look at Rubinstein's last moves. First with 17. ♔e3 he protected the d4-pawn, making the knight ready for action. With the following move, he prevented a check on g4 – so the king, pawn and knight nicely collaborate. Each piece supports centralisation and keeps the opponent's pieces far from the centre!

There were not many such masters in the past so dedicated to centralisation as Great Akiba was!

18... ♗d7 19. g4! h6

(see diagram next page)



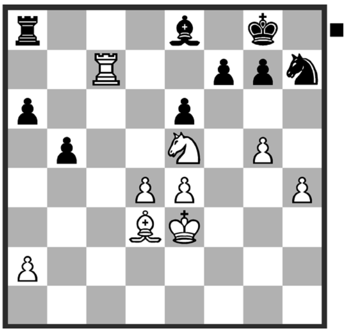
Position after: 19... h6

20. f4!

Correct decision! White renews the threat of g5.

20. h4 is not so good – the f-file is more important than the h-file!

20... ♗e8 21. g5 hxg5 22. fxg5 ♘h7 23. h4 ♖dc8 24. ♖bc1 ♖xc7 25. ♖xc7



Position after: 25. ♖xc7

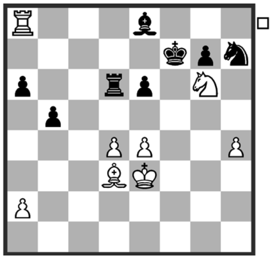
Black's position is hopeless. There is a big difference in activity! White's centralised pieces are ultra-powerful, while the black pieces are out of play.

25... ♖d8 26. ♖a7

Converting a positional advantage into a material one.

26... f6

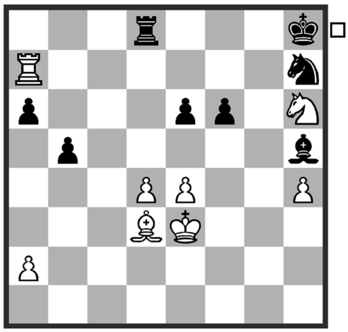
26... ♖d6 allows a beautiful finale after 27. ♖a8 ♔f8 28. g6 fxg6 29. ♘xg6+ ♔f7



Position after: 29... ♔f7

30. ♘h8+! ♔f8 31. e5 Now, the white pieces are placed in corners, but this setup decides the game!

27. gxf6 gxf6 28. ♘g4 ♗h5 29. ♘h6+ ♔h8



Position after: 29... ♔h8

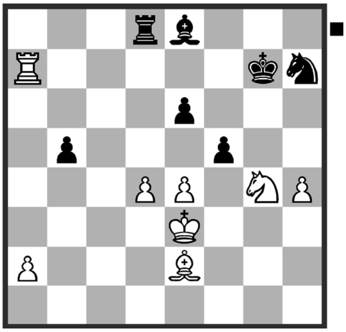
30. ♗e2!

Following the same strategy and kicking out active pieces!

30... ♗e8

30... ♗xe2? 31. ♘f7+

31. ♖xa6 ♔g7 32. ♘g4 f5 33. ♖a7+!

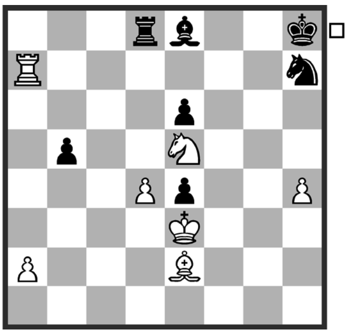


Position after: 33. ♖a7+!

33... ♔h8

33... ♔g6 is bad, there is a risk Black's king will be mated. 34. h5+ ♔g5 35. ♖g7+ ♔h4 36. exf5 exf5 37. ♘h6 is winning. Now 37... ♘f8 38. ♘xf5+ ♔h3 39. ♗f1+ ♔h2 40. ♖g2+ ♔h3 41. ♖g3+ ♔h2 42. ♔f2 leads to mate.

34. ♘e5 fxe4



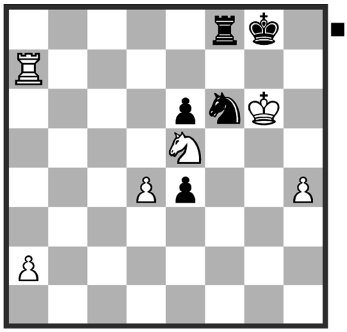
Position after: 34... fxe4

It looks like Black consolidated his position by exchanging some material. But, Rubinstein's next move proves Black is desperately lost – after perfectly carrying out the game strategically, there must be some tactics coming up!

35. ♗xb5! ♘f6 36. ♗xe8 ♖xe8 37. ♔f4!

White chooses the fastest plan. Black's king is in danger and White goes directly for the kill.

37... ♔g8 38. ♔g5 ♖f8 39. ♔g6



Position after: 39. ♔g6

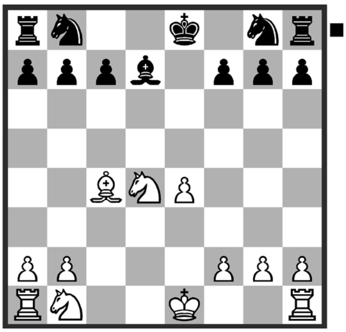
Black resigns! What a triumph! From the opening, the white pieces dominated in the centre, while Black was not allowed to activate his pieces, even for a moment! Black made only one bad move – castling, and it was enough for Rubinstein to demonstrate his amazing understanding of chess strategy, giving a perfect example to his followers!

1-0

Game 2

Karpov – Seirawan
Skelleftea 1989

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. e4 e5 4. ♘f3 ♗b4+ 5. ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 6. ♕xd2 exd4 7. ♕xd4 ♕xd4 8. ♘xd4 ♗d7 9. ♗xc4



Position after: 9. ♗xc4

The game started pretty sharply and an uncommon line was chosen by the players. But, after exchanges, it is clear the game will be a positional one. Actually, Black should be satisfied with the position that arose from the opening. The biggest problem for Black is his opponent. Karpov always played superbly in positions with a small but stable positional advantage – such positions were his trademark throughout his career.

White is slightly better due to a small space advantage and slightly better development. White is about to harmoniously place his pieces in the centre, seeking the initiative. With his next move, Black tries to stop this.

9... ♘c6 10. ♘xc6!

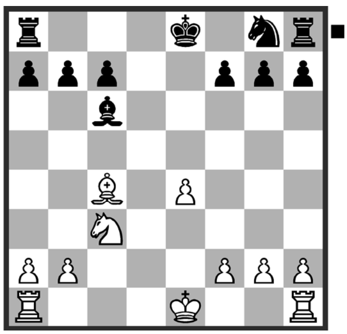
This is the only move that keeps the advantage. It looks like a loss of tempo, but other moves would waste time.

A) 10. ♘b3? 0-0-0! with the idea of ...♘b4 or ...♘e5. Surprisingly, Black gets the initiative immediately.

B) 10. ♘f3?! ♗e6!? 11. ♗xe6 fxe6 12. ♘c3 ♘f6 then placing the king on e7 and occupying the d-file looks very solid for Black.

C) 10. ♘b5? can even be fatal 10... 0-0-0 11. ♗xf7? ♘e5 12. ♗xg8 ♗xb5 13. ♗e6+ ♔b8 14. ♘c3 ♗a6 and White is hopeless.

10... ♗xc6 11. ♘c3



Position after: 11. ♘c3

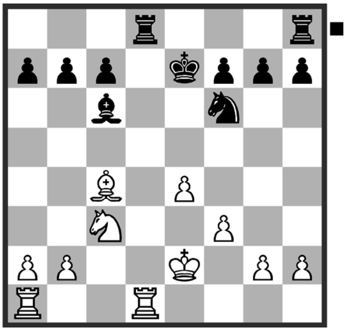
11... ♖d8?

This is the first imprecise move. Black wants to prevent White from castling long, but White actually wants to place his king on e2 and then e3. As a result,

Black will have problems with the f7-pawn, which will soon become clear.

11... ♘f6! was correct. After 12. f3 ♔e7 13. ♔e2 ♖hd8 White's advantage is only visual and not significant.

12. ♔e2 ♘f6 13. f3 ♔e7 14. ♖hd1



Position after: 14. ♖hd1

Comparing this position with the aforementioned line, it is clear that Black has the "wrong" rook on d8. Evidently, he cannot capture on d1 followed by placing the other rook on d8 because the pawn on f7 is hanging. Actually, it is not obvious how to effectively activate the h8-rook without wasting time.

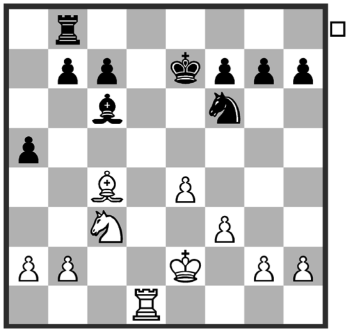
14... a5

Probably played with the idea to "activate the majority". Of course, that is not the way to activate. Another idea might be the activation of the rook via the a-file. Black is forced to play on the flank – that is a bad sign. He lost the struggle for the centre and is paying the price.

15. ♖ac1

Creating "x-ray" pressure on the c-file.

15... ♖xd1 16. ♖xd1 ♖b8

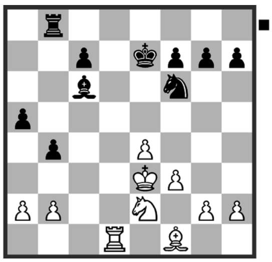


Position after: 16... ♖b8

Preparing to advance the b-pawn, which is ignored by White. This move would only weaken the c5-square. Another move away from the centre.

17. ♔e3 g6

17... b5 18. ♗f1 b4 19. ♘e2



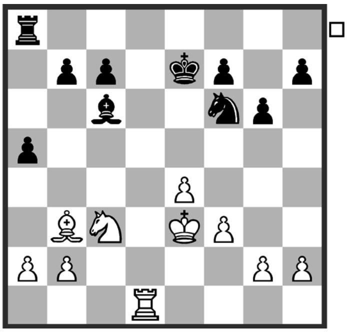
Position after: 19. ♘e2

is bad for Black. White moves his knight to d4 and rook to c1, with various threats.

18. ♗b3

A prophylactic move against 18... b5.

18... ♖a8



Position after: 18... ♖a8

Black still wanders. Although, it is difficult to suggest anything else. Whenever the bishop on c6 moves, White will play e5, which is crushing. On the kingside, Black cannot find any single reasonable move either. He is forced to wait...

19. ♖d4!

Typical Karpov move. After any move far away from the centre from Black, he answers with a strong centralisation move, building stronger and stronger both positional and psychological pressure. The rook from d4 prevents ...a4 and is also ready to be transferred to the kingside after advancing the e-pawn.

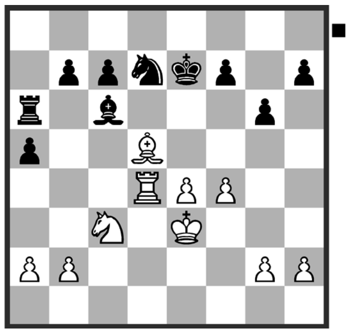
19... ♘d7

What else?

20. ♗d5

Black voluntarily reduced control over the d5-square and White immediately takes his chance. 20. ♘d5+ is wrong. After 20... ♗xd5 21. ♗xd5 ♘e5! 22. ♗xb7 ♖b8 Black is not worse. His pieces finally become active.

20... ♖a6 21. f4!



Position after: 21. f4!

Improving the kingside position, enabling e5 and waiting for the opponent to capture first.

21... f6 22. h4!

22. g4? g5! and the black knight finally gets the perfect outpost on e5.

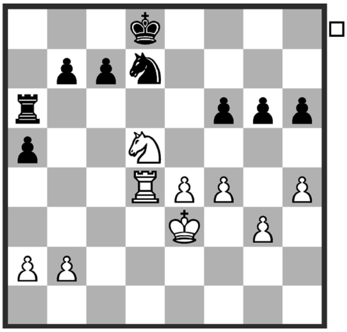
22... h6

Once again, Black is ready to play ...g5.

23. g3

Don't rush!

23... ♗xd5 24. ♘xd5+ ♔d8



Position after: 24... ♔d8

25. ♘c3!

Every simplification would be in Black's favour. Black wanted to play ...♖d6 followed by ...c6.

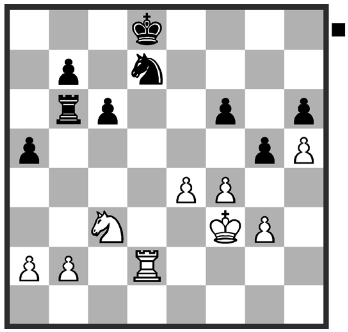
25... ♖b6 26. ♖d2!

The rook's job on the 4th rank is over. It now goes to the 2nd rank to support the move h5. The point is that White wants to eliminate Black’s g6-pawn and create an outpost on f5! With three connected pawns on the same rank, it is very natural to attack the middle one – if it is exchanged or advanced, an outpost would be created (see comments on White’s move 22).

A) 26. b3? is the wrong move order. After 26... ♖c6, whatever White chooses, the rook cannot easily be placed on the 2nd rank. Actually, if Black moves the rook to some other square, the move b3 would not be needed at all.

B) 26. h5 of course was strong too, but Karpov did not want to change the rhythm of play. Indeed, why go for complications if everything is going smoothly?

26... c6 27. h5! g5 28. ♔f3



Position after: 28. ♔f3

Both the knight and king are ready to occupy the f5-square.

28... ♔e7 29. ♘e2?!

29. ♘d1! is much better – the knight inevitably gets to f5.

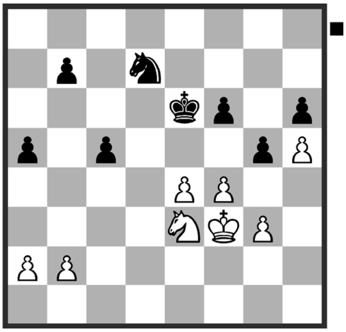
29... c5 30. ♘c3 ♖d6 31. ♖d5

31. ♖xd6 ♔xd6 32. e5+ ♔e6 would complicate White's task. The text move leaves Black in a hopeless situation.

31... ♖xd5

What else? Black is paralysed.

32. ♘xd5+ ♔e6 33. ♘e3


Position after: 33. ♘e3

The rest is simple.

33... b5 34. ♘f5 ♘b6 35. ♘xh6 ♘c4 36. ♘f5 ♔f7

36... ♘xb2 37. h6 ♔f7 38. h7+–

37. b3 ♘d2+ 38. ♔e3 ♘f1+

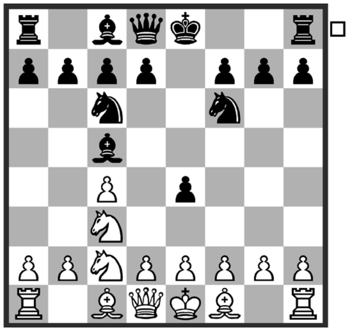
Black resigned without waiting for White to respond. The knight is trapped. A game won in typical "Karpovian" style. Centralisation and patient improving with fine realisation at the end. Very often he would leave opponents confused after the game, desperately wanting to understand where they erred. No obvious mistakes – just superb Karpov style and technique.

1-0

Game 3

Reti – Nimzowitsch
Marienbad 1925

1. c4 e5 2. ♘f3 e4 3. ♘d4 ♘c6 4. ♘c2 ♗c5 5. ♘c3 ♘f6

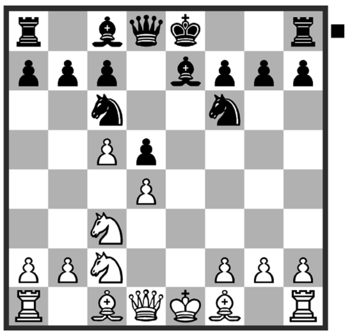

Position after: 5... ♘f6

Both sides played unconventionally, but now the pawn setup starts to resemble the French Defence, exchange variation structure. It really looks like Black has no problems – White has spent time to transfer the knight to c2.

6. d4 exd3 7. exd3 d5!

White wanted to gain some tempi by advancing his d-pawn.

8. d4 ♗e7 9. c5


Position after: 9. c5

9... ♗f5

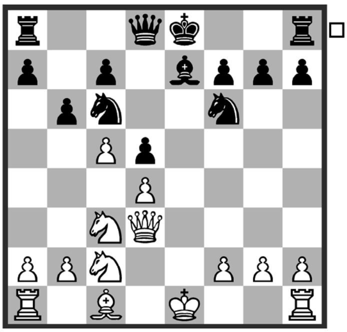
Evidently, Black will first activate his troops. White must be wary of attacks with ...b6. There is already the direct threat to the d4-pawn.

9... b6?! 10. ♗b5 ♗d7 11. 0-0 0-0 doesn't give Black anything. Nimzowitch managed to attack the white pawn-chain in better fashion.

10. ♗d3

10. ♗b5 is another option. 10... 0-0 11. ♘e3 [11. ♗xc6 bxc6 must be at least comfortable for Black, or even slightly better.] 11... ♗g6 12. 0-0 ♕d7 is one of the possible continuations. Black is doing perfectly fine.

10... ♗xd3 11. ♕xd3 b6!



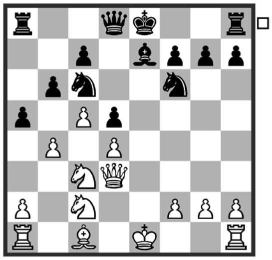
Position after: 11... b6!

The right moment!

12. 0-0

A) 12. cxb6 axb6 is excellent for Black.

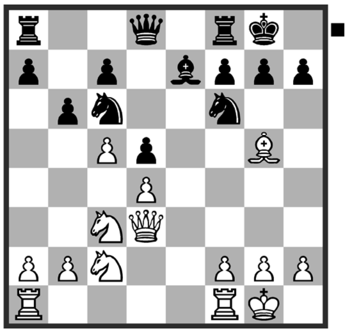
B) 12. b4?! a5!



Position after: 12... a5!

13. a3 [13. b5? ♘b4! and the white position collapses. Now the point of Black's 9th move is clear – the queen is provoked to the d3-square, and the knight jumps to b4 with tempo.] 13... axb4 14. axb4 ♖xa1 15. ♘xa1 bxc5 16. bxc5 ♘e4 with good chances for Black.

12... 0-0 13. ♗g5



Position after: 13. ♗g5

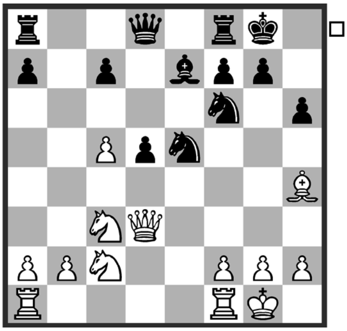
13... h6!

13... bxc5 14. dxc5 ♘e5 15. ♕g3 attacking the knight on e5, Black doesn't have time to play ...c6, fixing the c5-pawn on a dark square and supporting the strong d5-pawn.

14. ♗h4

14. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 was another option for White. Black's position is very solid.

14... bxc5! 15. dxc5 ♘e5



Position after: 15... ♘e5

16. ♕d4

16. ♕g3 ♘g6! threatening ...♘h4 and ...♘e4.

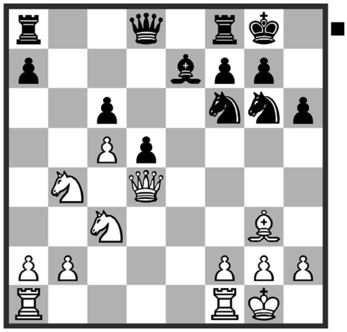
16... ♘g6

And here is the point behind Black's 13th move. The bishop on h4 is attacked and Black is able to support the pawn on d5!

17. ♗g3

17. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 18. ♕xd5 ♗xc3 19. ♕xd8 ♖fxd8 20. bxc3 ♖d5 must be in Black's favour. His rook on c5 will both attack the weak pawn on c3 and protect weak c7-pawn.

17... c6 18. ♘b4



Position after: 18. ♘b4

Intending to put that knight on d3, protecting c5 and blockading the passed d-pawn. White understands the blockade on d4 would not be efficient, and is ready to establish it on d3. On the other hand, Black successfully finished development and already is slightly better. The main factor for such an evaluation is White's exposed pawn on c5, fixed on a dark square. Black's bishop will be more dangerous. Even the black knights can more easily find good squares. In a few moves, Black's pieces will dominate the centre, while White's pieces will be without harmony.

18... ♖c8

Better than to use the queen to protect c6. This rook will temporarily be a defender – the b8-square is controlled by the bishop on g3. Meanwhile, the black queen can be active, probably on a5.

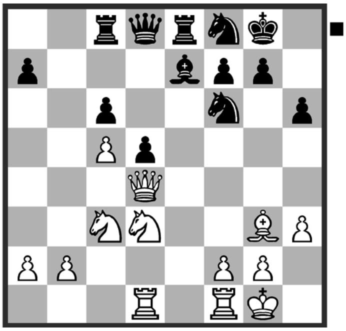
19. h3?!

How to punish White for this inaccuracy? Instead of taking care of Black's

initiative in the centre, White just ignored it. Well, let's go for centralisation! Nimzowitsch convincingly increases the initiative, proving White must play very precisely. He decided to improve his centre, while increasing harmony and putting more pressure on the c5-pawn.

19. ♘d3 was much better. The move played in the game is just a waste of time. Black would never go for ...♘h5.

19... ♖e8! 20. ♖ad1 ♘f8! 21. ♘d3



Position after: 21. ♘d3

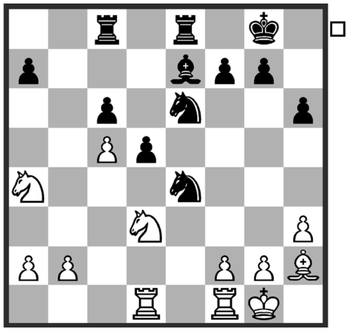
21... ♕a5

21... ♘e6 was natural and also a very good move. But, Nimzowitsch decided to give White the chance to exchange queens.

22. ♕a4

22. b4? ♕a3! and after ...♘e6, Black would destroy the white pawn structure by playing ...a5.

22... ♕xa4 23. ♘xa4 ♘e4! 24. ♗h2 ♘e6



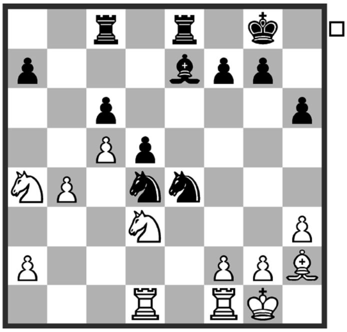
Position after: 24... ♘e6

Please, remember this position. You can see total disharmony in White's army. And full harmony in Black's. Take a look at the white knights, which must protect the weak pawn on c5, especially the one on a4. At the same time, the black knights are placed perfectly, controlling the entire centre. Notice, it is very useful to place knights and pawns on squares of the same colour. Placing them this way, you will control both light and dark squares. Also, the pawns can protect the knights. In our game, the black knights are truly dominant, but they would not be as dangerous without the support from the pawns. Black is much better.

25. b4 ♘d4!

(see diagram next page)

There is a stormy dark cloud in the centre of the board.



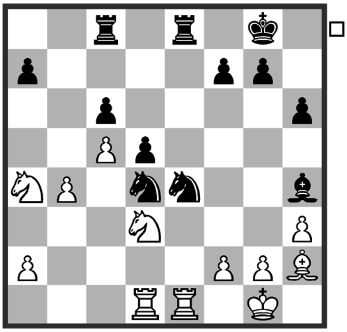
Position after: 25... ♘d4!

26. ♖fe1

Renewing the threat of f2-f3.

26. f3 is prevented. Black wins after 26... ♘e2+ 27. ♔h1 ♘4g3+.

26... ♗h4



Position after: 26... ♗h4

He who dominates in the centre can play on the flanks. The text move keeps the knight on e4 active and puts pressure on the f2-pawn.

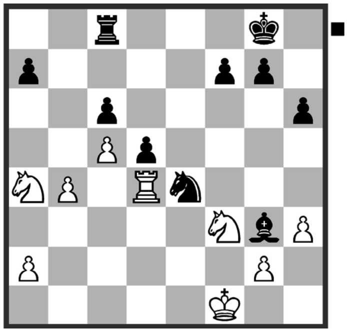
27. ♗e5?

A blunder. But, it is evident that Black was much better.

27... ♖xe5 28. ♘xe5 ♗xf2+ 29. ♔f1 ♗xe1 30. ♖xd4

30. ♖xe1 ♘c2–+

30... ♗g3! 31. ♘f3



Position after: 31. ♘f3

31... ♖e8!

Keeping the white king in a prison while threatening mate on e1.

32. ♖d1 ♖e6

With the idea to play ...♘g5 and then penetrate with ...♖f6–...♖f2.

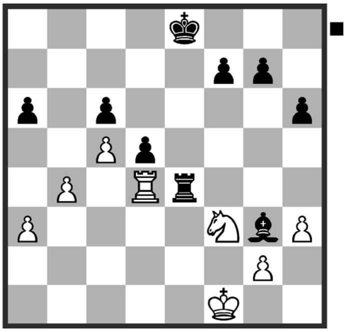
33. ♖c1 ♔f8

White’s position is hopeless. Black patiently activates his king.

34. ♘c3 ♘xc3 35. ♖xc3 ♖e4 36. a3

36. b5 cxb5 37. c6 ♖c4–+

36... ♔e8 37. ♖d3 a6 38. ♖d4



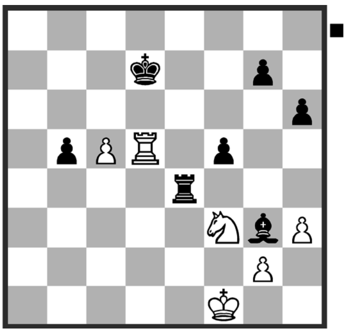
Position after: 38. ♖d4

White desperately wants to get rid of Black's ultra-active pieces. But simplifications are in Black's favour - he has an extra pawn.

38... f5!

A demonstration of power.

39. a4 ♔d7 40. b5 axb5 41. axb5 cxb5! 42. ♖xd5+



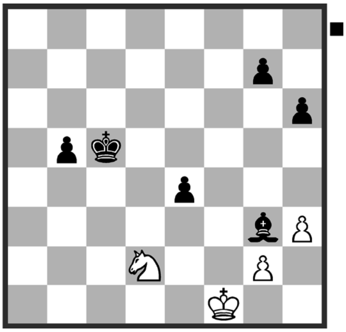
Position after: 42. ♖xd5+

It looks like White has achieved a lot. He reduced the material on the board and activated his rook... but, there is one problem – he cannot capture on f5.

42... ♔c6 43. ♖d4

43. ♖xf5 b4 44. ♖f8 b3 45. ♖d8 b2 46. ♖d1 ♖c4 47. ♘d2 ♖c2 wins easily.

43... ♔xc5 44. ♖xe4 fxe4 45. ♘d2



Position after: 45. ♘d2

The rest is a matter of technique. Not a problem for a master such as Nimzowitsch.

45... ♔d4 46. ♔e2 ♗f4 47. ♘b3+ ♔c4 48. ♘a5+ ♔c3 49. ♘b7 b4 50. ♘c5 ♔c2 51. g3 ♗xg3

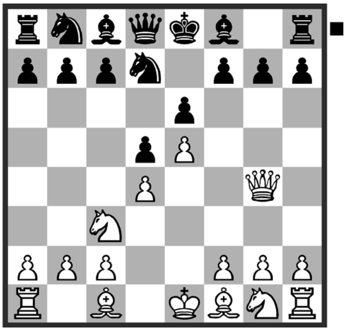
White resigned. One of the most illustrative games ever on the topic of centralisation and harmony. A masterpiece by the great Aron.

0-1

Game 4

Bogoljubow – Reti
Moravska Ostrava 1923

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4. e5 ♘fd7 5. ♕g4?!



Position after: 5. ♕g4?!

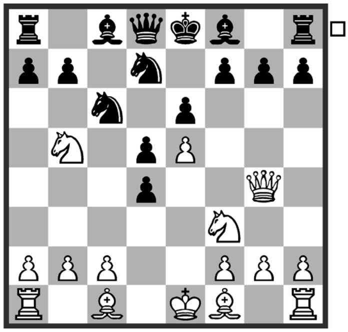
A dubious move, although still playable. The problem is that White connected it with a bad plan.

5... c5

Of course, Black strikes in the centre. This natural reflex is even better due to White's diversion on his last move.

6. ♘b5 cxd4 7. ♘f3 ♘c6

Black did not make a single imprecise move, so White must not go for a "winning immediately" approach. There is rarely a punishment for an opponent that has played normal and healthy moves.



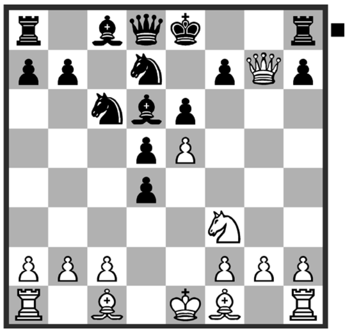
Position after: 7... ♘c6

With his next manoeuvre, White neglects the centre and gives away full control to his opponent.

8. ♘d6+?

8. ♗f4 was a better option, although Black’s position is already preferable.

8... ♗xd6 9. ♕xg7



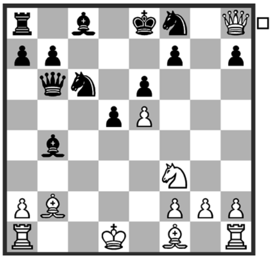
Position after: 9. ♕xg7

9... ♗xe5?

Black returns the favour. But, this mistake is simply miscalculation or... no calculation at all. Knowing Richard Reti,

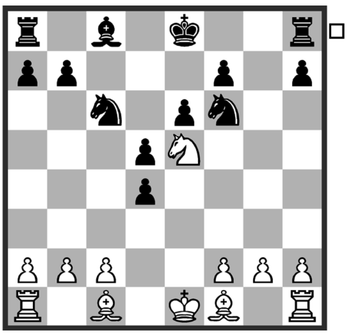
such a fine positional player, we can suppose that he was dedicated to solving problems in the centre, probably omitting to search for a direct win.

9... ♗b4+ led to a fairly easy win after 10. c3 dxc3 11. ♕xh8+ ♘f8 12. ♔d1 cxb2 13. ♗xb2 ♕b6.


Position after: 13... ♕b6

Having near material balance (a pawn for an exchange is not a significant deficit) and superior activity with such a naked White king, Black will reach an absolutely winning position. White's pieces are undeveloped and scattered and defeat is inevitable.

10. ♘xe5 ♕f6 11. ♕xf6 ♘xf6


Position after: 11... ♘xf6

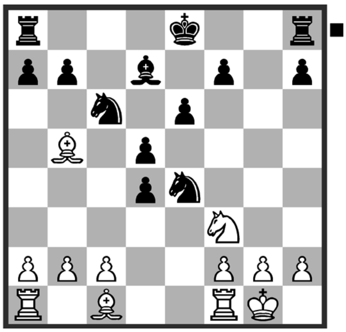
Black temporarily has an extra pawn and White needs some time to return material. His advantage of the bishop pair should not be significant, because of the dangerous black pawn avalanche in the centre. A strong central pawn formation is a more important positional factor and Black is already a bit better.

12. ♗b5 ♗d7 13. ♘f3 ♘e4

Centralising a piece and preparing the advance of central pawns.

13... ♘b4 was also a very good move, perhaps an even better one. Black immediately puts pressure on the c2-pawn and forces White to exchange bishops.

14. 0-0


Position after: 14. 0-0

14... f6!

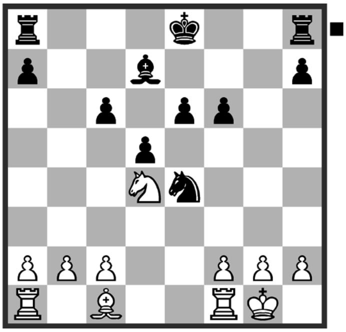
A good move, preparing to gain space in the centre. 14... a6 forces White to take on c6, but this will be a waste of time.

The text move is better, because it also forces White to take on c6 and must be played to prepare ...e5.

15. ♗xc6 bxc6

That move should be preferred – Black's avalanche in the centre looks even more impressive now.

16. ♘xd4



Position after: 16. ♘xd4

16... c5

This is the more precise attack on the knight. The move ...e5 is unstoppable as well.

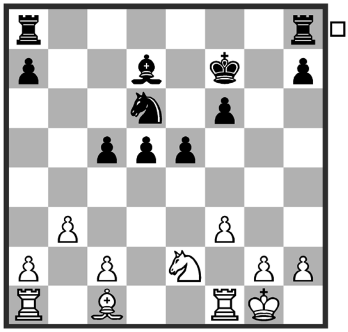
16... e5 allows White to fight for the c5-square after 17. ♘b3.

17. ♘e2 ♔f7

There are many good moves here. Black chose this one, it is a matter of style...

Of course, other good options include 17... e5, 17... ♖c8, 17... ♖b8, 17... ♖g8.

18. f3 ♘d6 19. b3 e5



Position after: 19... e5

As a result of the risky (and bad) excursion of the white knight, Black is better. White has no more bishop pair, and the black pawn centre looks strong and impressive. Also, Black has more space, better piece centralisation and the better bishop.

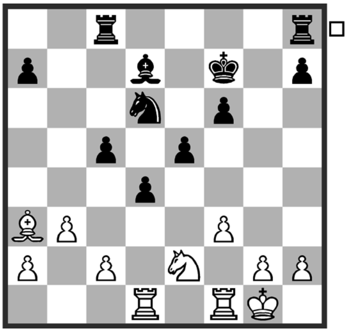
Note: do not think Black has all that advantage randomly. No, usually one advantage leads to another... White has problems in finishing development, and even after finishing it there will be a lack of harmony in his camp due to a lack of space.

20. ♗a3 ♖ac8

That rook, of course. Black predicts the other rook will probably be needed on the d-file, in order to prepare advancing the pawns.

21. ♖ad1 d4

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 21... d4

Please, remember the following quote: “pawns and knights should stay on squares of the same colour, and bishops on opposite ones.”

Take a look at the black central pawns and minor pieces – there is full harmony! All central squares are perfectly covered! Now, imagine the black knight and bishop swapping places – instead of harmony there would only be light-squared weaknesses!

22. ♘c1 ♘f5

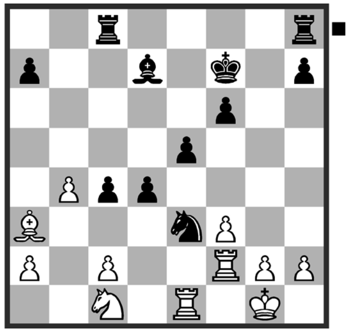
Black found a target, the c2-pawn.

23. ♖f2 ♘e3 24. ♖e1 c4

24... ♗f5 was also a good move, but still the text move should be preferred.

25. b4

Only one brief look at the position is enough to reach an evaluation – White is hopeless.



Position after: 25. b4

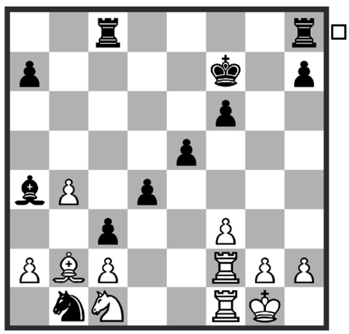
His pieces are cramped while Black’s pieces dominate, together with the central pawns. Here, Black found a beautiful manoeuvre...

25... ♗a4 26. ♖ee2 ♘d1 27. ♖f1 ♘c3 28. ♖ef2 ♘b1?

... but, executed it poorly. He missed White's 30th move.

28... ♘b5 29. ♗b2 c3 30. ♗a1 would win easily – White plays without a bishop.

29. ♗b2 c3



Position after: 29... c3

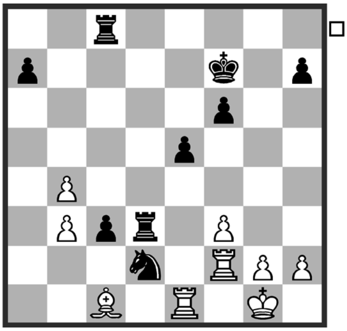
30. ♘b3

This move delays resignation. Black is forced to find more good moves to convert.

30... ♗xb3! 31. axb3

31. ♖xb1 ♗xa2 32. ♖a1 cxb2–+

31... ♘d2 32. ♖e1 ♖hd8! 33. ♗c1 d3! 34. cxd3 ♖xd3



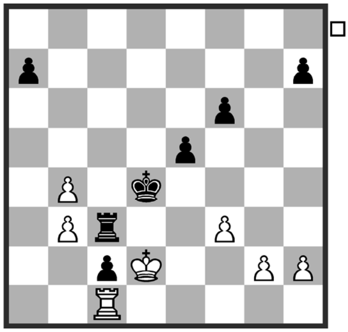
Position after: 34... ♖xd3

After a series of active black moves, White is close to resignation.

35. ♗xd2 ♖xd2

Taking with the pawn was also winning. Black transposes to a trivial endgame – the rook behind the passed-pawn decides the game.

36. ♖a1 ♔e6 37. ♔f1 ♖xf2+ 38. ♔xf2 c2 39. ♖c1 ♔d5 40. ♔e3 ♖c3+ 41. ♔d2 ♔d4



Position after: 41... ♔d4

White is in some kind of zugzwang. Black's king will inevitably collect the white kingside pawns, with a win to follow.

42. h4 ♖d3+

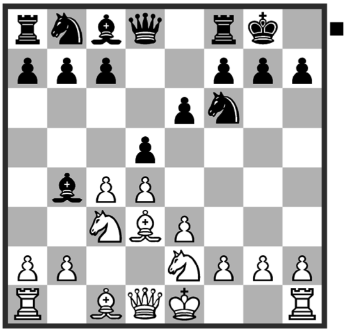
White resigned. A terrible defeat. Never forget about the centre and never go for a flank attack if your centre is not secured. White's centre simply collapsed in this game after his 8th move. Afterwards, White could not get control back over the centre and the punishment was well deserved.

0-1

Game 5

Stolberg – Botvinnik
Moscow 1940

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. e3 0-0 5. ♗d3 d5 6. ♘ge2



Position after: 6. ♘ge2

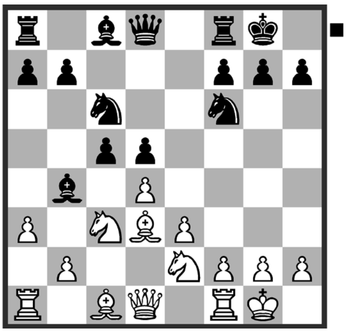
6... c5

Black decides to crush the white pawn centre immediately. 6... dxc4 7. ♗xc4 c5 was also very solid.

7. 0-0 ♘c6 8. cxd5 exd5

8... ♘xd5 is bad. After 9. ♘xd5 ♕xd5 10. a3 ♗a5 11. ♕c2, White attacks pawns both on c5 and h7 with a clear advantage

9. a3



Position after: 9. a3

9... cxd4

9... ♗xc3 10. bxc3 c4 11. ♗c2 b5 is also playable, of course. But that plan simplifies White's task. White will organise the e4-advance with ♘g3 and f3. The text move poses more problems to White.

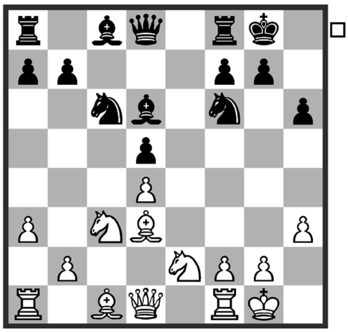
10. exd4

10. axb4 dxc3 11. bxc3 ♘e5 gives comfortable play to Black. White will dominate the d4-square, but on the other hand Black can use the squares c4 and e4.

10... ♗d6 11. h3

11. ♗f4 was a logical move, finishing development and exchanging a bad bishop for a good one. Instead of that, White made his bishop a worse piece... You'll see.

11... h6



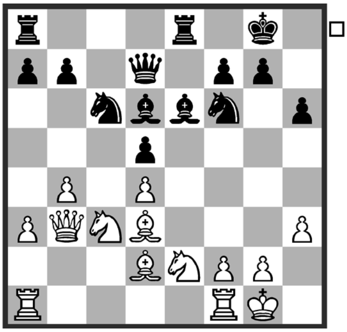
Position after: 11... h6

Securing the d5-pawn by preventing ♗g5.

12. b4?!

White wanted to secure a spot for the queen on b3. Alas, advancing pawns on the queenside misses its mark. In open positions, pawn play is rarely promising. Piece play should be preferred!

12... ♖e8 13. ♕b3 ♗e6 14. ♗d2 ♕d7



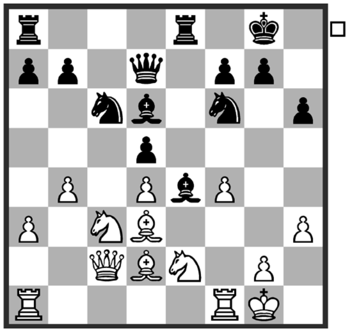
Position after: 14... ♕d7

Black harmoniously finished development and is already better. The idea of the last few moves is the exchange of the light-squared bishops.

15. f4?

It looks like suicide. One is not allowed to play on the flank if worse off in the centre. Also, attacking the black king is just an illusion. Take a look at the pawn on f4, restricting the rook, bishop and knight. Try to move or exchange such pawns in your games. And, what's more, e4 and e3 are now desperately weak squares. Black's idea of exchanging light-squared bishops is even more logical and dangerous now.

15... ♗f5! 16. ♕c2 ♗e4!



Position after: 16... ♗e4!

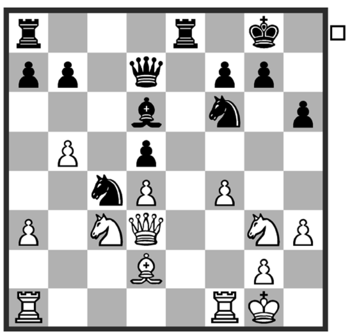
17. b5?

The game is over now. White invites so many black pieces into his camp. The knight goes to c4, along with future invasions on the c- and e-files. White is without counterplay. With careless advances, White simply gave Black full control over the centre.

17... ♗xd3 18. ♕xd3

18. bxc6 ♕f5–+

18... ♘a5 19. ♘g3 ♘c4



Position after: 19... ♘c4

20. ♗c1

20. ♘xd5 is not good. After 20... ♘xd5 21. ♕xc4 ♘e3 22. ♗xe3 ♖xe3 things are bad for White. There is no good place for the knight to retreat to and Black will keep the initiative with ...♖c8.

20... ♖ac8

White cannot oppose the black occupation of light central squares. His position is hopeless.

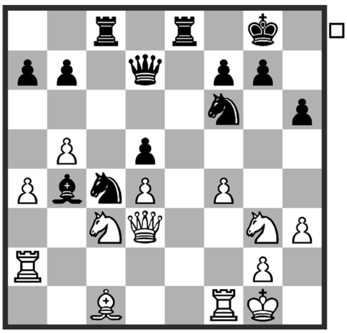
21. ♖a2 ♗f8

Supporting the d5-pawn and freeing the d6-square for the knight.

22. a4

This leaves the b4-square without control, but what else is there to suggest for White...?

22... ♗b4



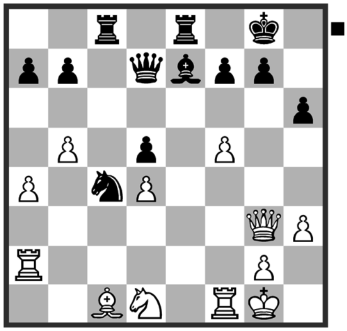
Position after: 22... ♗b4

Black would be happy to exchange the bishop for the knight – the e4-square will be easier to control.

23. ♘d1 ♘e4 24. f5

Trying to die for something... With some precise moves, Black eliminates all threats on the kingside.

24... ♘xg3 25. ♕xg3 ♗d6 26. ♕f3 ♗e7 27. ♕g3



Position after: 27. ♕g3

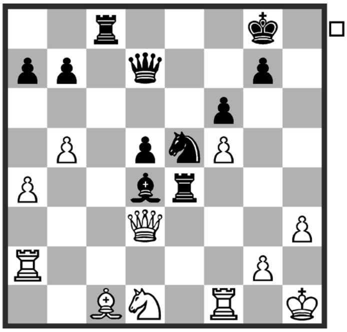
27... ♗f6! 28. ♗xh6

It looks like White got some chances, but that was just an illusion.

28... ♗xd4+

The pawn on d4 is more important than the one on h6. See how Black invades on central squares. Very soon, a storm will break out in the centre.

29. ♔h1 f6! 30. ♗c1 ♖e4 31. ♕d3 ♘e5



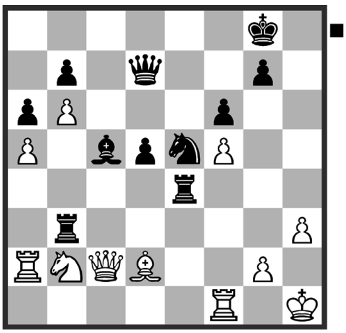
Position after: 31... ♘e5

If you follow games by such great masters, chess looks like a really simple game. Actually, it is sometimes. Dominate the centre and you will dominate all over the board.

32. ♕b1 ♖c4

Black used his last move to achieve full centralisation. At the same time, White regrouped his troops... to the first rank! Botvinnik convincingly realises his advantage.

33. a5 ♗c5 34. b6 a6 35. ♘b2 ♖c3 36. ♗d2 ♖b3 37. ♕c2



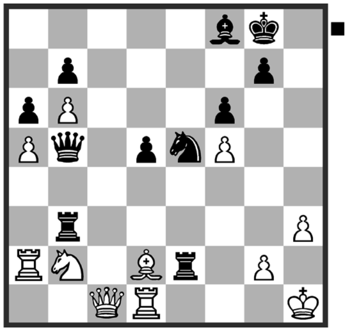
Position after: 37. ♕c2

Not that many squares are available for the white pieces...

37... ♕b5 38. ♖c1 ♗f8 39. ♖d1 ♖e2

Dominating in the centre gives you excellent prospects on both flanks. Botvinnik chooses the fastest way – he attacks White's king. White's cramped pieces on the queenside are of no help.

40. ♕c1



Position after: 40. ♕c1

40... ♖xh3+! 41. gxh3 d4

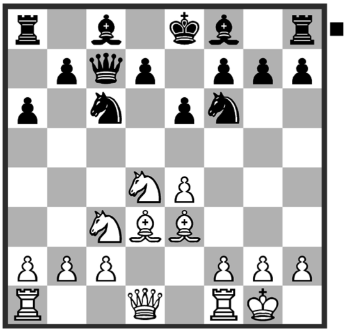
A sad fate for White. Paralysed pieces in open positions is not a common site. There is no way to prevent ...♕d5, with mate. White resigned. A terrible defeat. Recklessly advancing pawns, White invited the black pieces to comfortable central positions. The realisation of a big positional advantage should be carefully studied and it depicts Botvinnik's impressive technique.

0-1

Game 6

Tal – Kochyev
Leningrad 1977

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘c3 ♕c7 6. ♗d3 ♘c6 7. ♗e3 ♘f6 8. 0-0



Position after: 8. 0-0

8... ♘e5!?

8... b5 is considered more precise nowadays.

9. h3

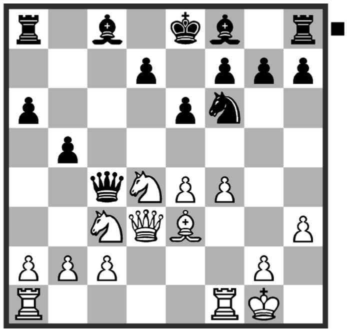
White prevents the jump to g4.

9... b5 10. f4 ♘c4 11. ♗xc4

The dark-squared bishop is a valuable one.

11... ♕xc4 12. ♕d3!

Tal was also an expert in positional chess. This game is confirmation.



Position after: 12. ♕d3!

The last move strengthens the centre and makes ...b4 useless.

12... ♗b7?!

12... ♕c7 was perhaps better. Black renews the motif of advancing ...b4. The waste of time was not significant.

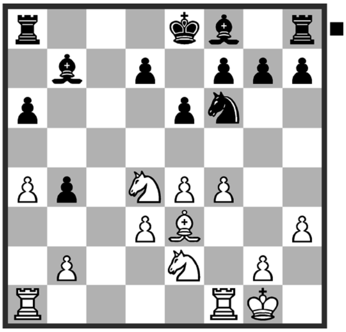
13. a4!

Simply an excellent move. Using the fact that the queen is protected by the b-pawn, White strikes. Black's advance ...b4 forces him to prematurely capture on d3.

13... ♕xd3 14. cxd3 b4 15. ♘ce2

(see diagram next page)

This is the point. White's pawns on d3 and e4 restrict the black knight and b7-bishop. They also perfectly fit with White's minor pieces and will make for a perfect shield for the king later on. Black's advanced queenside pawns are in trouble.



Position after: 15. ♘ce2

White wants to occupy the important a5-square with the knight, so Black would be forced to advance the a-pawn, making it vulnerable. Also, Black is unable to open the position – any advance will only create weaknesses. White will gain control over the c-file. And, most importantly, White has a strong and harmonious formation in the centre, while Black has only exposed queenside pawns. The diagnosis is evident – White is much better.

15... ♗c5 16. ♔f2!

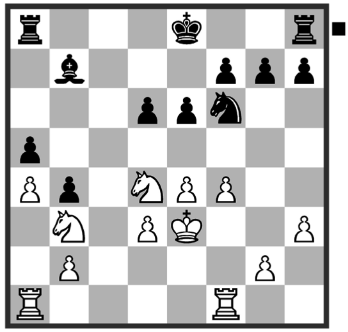
Protecting the bishop, activating the king and supporting the centre.

16... d6 17. ♘b3

Very simple, but still inspiring play from Tal.

17... ♗xe3+ 18. ♔xe3 a5 19. ♘ed4

White's centralised cavalry starts to dance. So many weak squares on the queenside are on the menu.

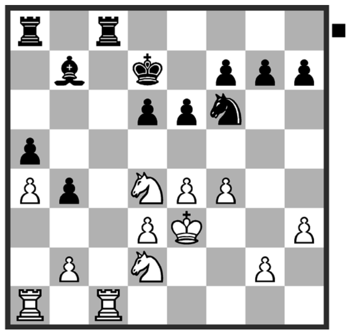


Position after: 19. ♘ed4

19... ♔d7 20. ♖fc1 ♖hc8

Both sides have activated their troops. White must find a plan to grasp the initiative and reach some degree of harmony.

21. ♘d2!



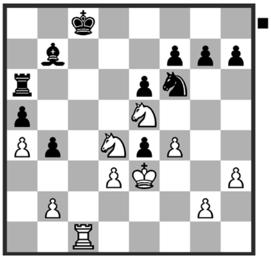
Position after: 21. ♘d2!

Again, a simple and strong solution. Black's main weakness is the pawn on a5. White regroups to place the knights on b3 and c4.

Once you find the opponent's weakness, make it your target! Tal effectively uses his cavalry in this game.

21... ♖a6 22. ♖xc8 ♔xc8 23. ♘4b3

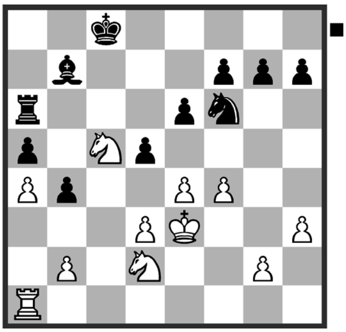
23. ♘c4 leads to complications after 23... d5 24. ♘e5 dxe4 25. ♖c1+



Position after: 25. ♖c1+

25... ♔d8 [or 25... ♔b8 26. ♘ec6+! ♗xc6 27. ♘xc6+ ♔a8 28. dxe4] 26. ♘xf7+ ♔e8 27. ♘g5 with an advantage for White.

23... d5 24. ♘c5



Position after: 24. ♘c5

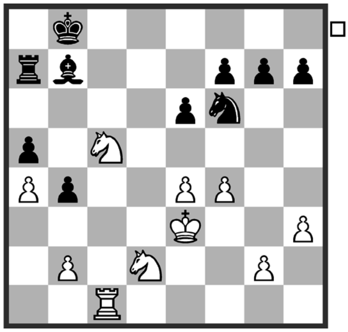
24... ♖a7

24... ♖c6 25. ♘db3+–

25. ♖c1

Compare White's control over the centre to Black's. From a strategical point of view, the game is already over. There are, of course, remaining technical issues that Tal has no problems with.

25... dxe4 26. dxe4 ♔b8



Position after: 26... ♔b8

How to penetrate? How to attack the weakness on a5? Well, there is a simple solution.

27. ♘xb7

Tal chooses the simplest and most direct way. Black's pieces will get some activity, but that is irrelevant.

27... ♔xb7

27... ♖xb7 28. ♖c5 is even worse for Black.

28. ♖c5 ♘d7 29. ♖b5+ ♔c8 30. ♘c4 ♖c7 31. ♔d4!